

California's Oil Regulator to Review Underground Injection Control Program

Review of Permits, Approval Practices, and Program Rules

SACRAMENTO – The Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (DOGGR) today announced steps to review the state's Underground Injection Control (UIC) Program in order to ensure that the program fully complies with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act, designed to prevent waste water associated with oil production from being injected into aquifers containing water suitable for human or agricultural use. DOGGR is conducting the review in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA.) .

The review will examine both specific, previously approved UIC wells, as well as current approval practices to ensure that they are consistent throughout the state and that no injection occurs into protected aquifers.

The Division is also reviewing the underlying UIC program rules. Revisions will be considered during this phase of the review process, which is expected to take 12-18 months to complete.

The announcement comes after DOGGR issued orders last month to seven oil production companies to immediately shut down 11 (of over 1,500 in California) waste water disposal wells to avoid potential harm to a limited number of groundwater aquifers in Kern County. The Division became aware that some wells might be injecting into non-exempt zones while reviewing documents related to implementation of SB 4, the state's new law regarding the use of well stimulation. The orders were issued after DOGGR discovered that the waste water disposal wells appeared to be injecting into protected sources of groundwater. The disposal permits suspended may have allowed injection into aquifers that do not appear to have received the necessary designation from the U.S. EPA.

"We shut these wells down and ordered the operators to provide information and conduct testing to ensure human and environmental health and safety is not at risk," said Steve Bohlen, State Oil and Gas Supervisor and head of DOGGR.

Since the initial orders were issued, two of the 11 wells have been authorized to resume operations following Division review. DOGGR, the State Water Resources Control Board, and the California Environmental Protection Agency, and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board are working closely with the Department of Public Health to ensure waste water injection will not contaminate water wells.

DOGGR has primary authority under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act to regulate underground injection wells related to oil and gas operations in California, granted by the U.S. EPA. In conjunction

with DOGGR, U.S. EPA simultaneously is reviewing the California UIC program. The results of the DOGGR and U.S. EPA review will guide future changes in the state's UIC program.

“In response to ongoing conversations with U.S. EPA, we have committed to a review and revision of the UIC program, as necessary,” said Jason Marshall, Chief Deputy Director of the California Department of Conservation, of which DOGGR is a part. “The UIC Primacy Agreement is now over 30 years old and there are many changes in industry practices and technology that merit inclusion in any revision of UIC regulations,” Marshall added.

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